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Sean Kretz
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Dear Mr Kretz

Short inspection of Yewstock School

Following my visit to the school on 10 January 2017 with Clive Robson, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be outstanding in June 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your staff and governors demonstrate ambition and high aspirations for the pupils. There is no complacency at this school. You and your staff continually reflect on and seek to improve the impact of your work and are absolutely determined to secure the best possible outcomes for the pupils. The school's expectation that pupils achieve high academic standards is skilfully balanced with the strong focus placed on developing their personal, social and communication skills. Consequently, pupils thrive in this school and make exceptional progress from their starting points, both in their academic and personal development.

Staff know and understand pupils' needs exceptionally well. They build strong relationships with their pupils and families which contribute very effectively to the strong progress pupils make. Parents greatly appreciate the education their child receives. They typically report, 'Yewstock provides a safe, inclusive environment in which pupils can achieve their full potential. The school has a positive and uplifting atmosphere.' Pupils' self-confidence builds during their time at the school. The 14 to 19 provision has developed significantly since opening in September 2015. Older pupils receive a curriculum appropriate for their age. For example, your strong focus on providing high-quality work experience and work-related opportunities for pupils in the 14 to 19 provision prepares them well for the next stage of their education, training or employment.

Subject leaders play a central role in the school's continued improvement. These leaders benefit from high-quality training, coaching and mentoring that you provide in addition to that offered by the Training Alliance of Dorset Special Schools. This alliance, of five local special schools, has provided both support and challenge to your leaders and staff. As a result, your subject leaders have developed their skills to accurately check standards and offer informative and precise support to colleagues. Their plans for improvement confirm a relentless drive to identify further actions to improve pupils' outcomes. Their work is having a significant impact on improving the already high standards that pupils reach in this school.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team places pupils' safety at the heart of the school's work. A strong culture of safeguarding is evident in the school. Staff attend training to ensure that they understand and carry out their roles and responsibilities assiduously. They understand the importance of completing risk assessments in detail to ensure that pupils are safe when attending off-site visits and work placements. Leaders ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and policies are robust and implemented effectively.

The school's systems to check the suitability of staff to work with pupils meet requirements. Leaders and governors have completed the training they need to recruit staff safely. In addition, staff receive training to manage pupils' behaviour successfully and also to spot possible signs of extremism or radicalisation. At times, pupils display challenging and anxious behaviours. Nonetheless, teachers go the extra mile to work with these pupils to build their resilience and self-confidence. The school's records confirm that pupils who arrive at the school with a history of exclusions or poor attendance settle quickly. Attendance has improved since the previous inspection and exclusion is now a rare occurrence.

Pupils are exceptionally well supervised at the start and end of each day. Staff ensure that pupils are safe despite the many buses which come onto the school site at these peak times. In discussions, pupils were knowledgeable about how to keep safe when using the internet. Older pupils were keen to tell the inspector that they feel listened to and that bullying is dealt with by adults when it occasionally occurs.

Inspection findings

- You lead a skilled and committed staff team which shares your vision to provide the very best education for every pupil. You communicate this vision successfully to the whole school community. Leaders relentlessly check the impact of their work to improve pupils' outcomes further. They precisely identify what needs to be done to develop pupils' personal and academic achievement so that they reach the highest possible standards. As a result, the school's performance has improved significantly since the previous inspection. Pupils make outstanding progress from their starting points in both their academic and personal development.

- Leaders' relentless focus to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has been pivotal to improving standards further. Rigorous checks on the quality of teaching support pupils to learn effectively. Feedback provided to teachers is precise but practical, helping staff to improve their teaching successfully. As a result, leaders and governors have a detailed understanding of where teaching is strong and where further support is needed. This thorough approach contributes significantly to building on the school's work. Plans for improvement include the specific actions that you and your leaders need to take. This analytical and robust approach has ensured the school has continued to improve strongly.
- The school works tirelessly to ensure that lessons planned meet pupils' specific needs. For example, the most able pupils in Year 8 discussed the properties of materials and their uses with great maturity and understanding in a design technology lesson. Younger pupils, with complex needs, successfully used large apparatus to support their movement in a physical education lesson. Leaders have been very successful in spotting potential in their staff and provide them with relevant training. For example, some teaching assistants are now trained and skilful teachers. In addition, the special needs manager has trained teaching assistants to deliver highly effective support. There is strong capacity for further improvement within the current leadership and teaching team.
- Teachers use the information they keep about pupils' progress to plan lessons which stretch and challenge pupils. Leaders have introduced new approaches to assessing pupils' progress to ensure even greater rigour in this aspect of their work. Teachers immediately identify any pupil who is not making at least expected progress. Interventions, delivered in the learning resource base, are precisely planned and 'bespoke' to meet individual pupils' needs. As a result, pupils catch up quickly and progress accelerates. In addition, a forensic analysis of the progress of groups such as disadvantaged pupils and those who are looked after ensures that these pupils make outstanding progress from their starting points.
- Pupils benefit from a wide range of therapy to support their communication and social development. This includes speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and music therapy. This work also serves to support pupils' well-being, and mental health is given a high priority. Nonetheless, a recent audit found some inconsistency in the quality of support for the development of pupils' communication skills across the school.
- The teaching of phonics has improved further since the previous inspection, as a result of the relentless drive to train all teachers to deliver high-quality lessons. This includes teachers in the early years and the 14 to 19 provision. The youngest pupils learn their initial sounds when ready and systematically build their knowledge and skills to begin to spell and read words and phrases. Work in books confirms that the most able pupils learn to write full sentences in a range of subjects across the curriculum, using mostly accurate punctuation and spelling. Rigorous tracking of pupils' progress in reading confirms that pupils make strong progress over time. However, leaders have identified that some teachers in the 14 to 19 provision would benefit from further training to deliver

phonics sessions even more effectively.

- Governors undertake their strategic role very effectively. They analyse the information given to them by the headteacher and ask challenging questions to assure themselves that individual pupils and all groups of pupils achieve well. They know the school's strengths and areas for further improvement in great depth. This enables governors to support leaders to make decisions which benefit the school and its pupils. As a result, the school has improved since the previous inspection. It is highly regarded within the community and attracts high-quality staff who want to work at Yewstock. However, governors ensure that the challenge they provide to leaders and strong systems to hold staff to account are also balanced with support and care for the staff. Staff say they feel valued and 'proud to work at the school'.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality and consistency of support for the development of pupils' communication skills is of the highest standard
- teachers in the 14 to 19 provision receive the training they need to deliver high-quality phonics lessons to their pupils to enable them to make the best possible progress in reading.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Dorset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Leahy
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, the deputy headteacher, subject leaders, the school's local authority improvement adviser and a group of four governors. Inspectors observed the start and end of the school day. Inspectors visited lessons, accompanied by a member of the senior leadership team, to observe teaching and learning. In addition, inspectors scrutinised pupils' work and discussed their achievements with senior leaders. They took account of 12 responses to the Parent View online questionnaire and a number of responses received by text. Also, they evaluated 48 responses to the staff questionnaire and nine questionnaire responses placed online by pupils. Inspectors analysed a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement planning, assessment information about the achievement and outcomes of pupils, and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures.

In particular, the inspection focused on the following key lines of enquiry.

- How effectively leaders have sustained and built on the quality of their provision judged outstanding at the previous inspection.
- Whether the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is impacting positively on securing outstanding outcomes for pupils across the school. If the school's assessment system is effective in providing the information teachers need to plan and deliver highly effective lessons.
- How well subject leaders are driving improvement in their areas of responsibility.
- If the culture of safeguarding is strong. Whether pupils know how to keep themselves safe. If the new e-safety policy is understood by pupils and staff and implemented effectively.
- Whether the school's capacity for continued improvement remains strong, including the effectiveness of governors in holding leaders to account for continued improvement.